

Rocky Arredondo Presents...

THE COBRA'S NOSE

Vol. 16

Because Cobras smell with their Tongues and Read with their Noses.

31 March 2000

The Cobra's Notes...

This is Bambi Lopez. I'm taking over.

Not forever, mind you—I *have* got better things to do with my time. Like slapping the little weasel who was reading *Keynesian Economics for Dummies* at the Coffee Plantation last Sunday. "Dummies" should not mess with Keynesian economics. Imagine the damage they could do. Like hurting my hand on their dumb glasses for one thing.

Anyway, I was letting the heat from my chai seep through its cardboard cup protector and into my sore knuckles when I spotted Sharon and Pat in a perplexing and somewhat heated discussion with Sophia about "monkey cousins." When the conversation seemed about to erupt into violence and tears I decided to intervene.

"I hurt my hand," I said, and held it out for them to see. All three gave me a puzzled look, though what I said was no more nonsensical than anything coming out of them. They invited me to sit.

After an uncomfortable pause I inquired, "Are you still writing that Nose thing?"

"Yes!" Sharon replied, "I hope to have one out by the end of the month." She pulled a wrinkled scrap of paper out of her bag.

I sifted through the pile and surreptitiously checked her face to see if she was putting me on. Hard to tell, she always looks so goofy. So I asked, "is this all you've got? 'Find/Manufacture pic of MJ w/ hair ablaze'? Hasn't Mr Enigma said anything weird lately?"

"Not to me," she said. "Ever since Jim Flynn moved into the cube next to his my visits feel like a female invasion of a 'GIRLS KEEP OUT' treehouse."

Who would have thought somebody could be a bad influence on Mr E? In any case, I sensed an opportunity to use the Nose thing as an agent of enlightenment rather than for...well, whatever its original purpose.

In this issue, you will find edifying submissions on film appreciation, free lunch acquisition, bat containment, ideas for things to do in the kitchen, and at least one thing not to do in a public place.

You can thank me later.

Bambi Lopez
Editor Pro Tem



One of Many Activities I Cannot Recommend

Pat, you remember Pat, my fabulous cousin Evelyn and I went to see Pazzport at Axis/Radius last Tuesday. I was in a good mood because Evelyn had laughed at some of my Nose prose before we left the house. At the time, I pointed to her and told Pat, "There, that's the kind of reaction I want out of you." "Be funnier, then," he replied.

I let that remark slide and basked in Evelyn's good taste. This led to an excess of self-confidence which took the form of a short skirt and big hair. Really big hair.

We arrived just as the band began to play, and went up to the loft area to get a good view away from the crowd. There was even a free table at the edge of the balcony and we all looked gorgeous by candlelight. Pat started to point out the local celebrities, one of whom was Zowie Bowie. Not *the* Zowie Bowie, son of David, just a guy who fronts a band in town, but he is usually worth looking at, so I leaned across the table to get a better look. I withdrew immediately, overcome by a terrible smell—not from Bowie. I jerked my head to the left and right trying to locate the source of the odor. It was all around my head in a gray cloud. MY HAIR WAS ON FIRE!!!

I patted out the flames with my left hand just as a waitress rushed up to see if I was alright. I assured her I was fine, so she blew out the candle and went away. At this point, Pat and Ev looked over to see what was happening, and there I was, dropping clumps of burned hair in the ashtray. Evelyn claimed the smell was negligible, and Pat told me he ignited his head on a regular basis when he welded. And come to think of it, I did get off sort of easy. Whenever I pictured my hair on fire (and having seen *The Towering Inferno* in my formative years, I do think about such things, it was always much worse.

Still, I can't recommend it.

Scream 2

(An Appreciation)

As editor/publisher/Cobra-in-Chief, I feel duty bound to redress certain injustices in society. One such is the under appreciation of Scream 2, which may seem perverse in that it grossed over \$100 million in its domestic release. Still, it was ghettoized as a teen slasher sequel thing even by its most sympathetic reviewers, and rarely praised for its nuanced writing, concise plotting, and emotional intensity—qualities lacked by, for instance, every movie nominated for a Best Picture Oscar this year. If you haven't seen it but plan to, I reveal plot points with impunity so stop reading right now. I'm guessing, though, that you either already have seen it or have decided never to see it and have tried to proceed accordingly. —ed.

To begin, *Scream 2* is the prettiest slasher flick ever made. Bright and



filmed by Peter Deming (whose career has one foot in comedies, like *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* and *House Party*, and the other in spiky horror romps like *Lost Highway* and zombie jamboree *Evil Dead 2*) in a high gloss style unusual in sequels to horror films. The result is a look that flatters even the dopey maroon streaks in Courtney Cox's hair while making the numerous murders, while not spectacularly gory, piquantly upsetting in their brightly lit execution.

But the gap between audience expectations of a movie filmed in the manner of *My Best Friend's Wedding* and the body count of *Macbeth* is only the beginning of *Scream 2's* artless

sophistication. It takes the most benighted of sub-sub-genres, the slasher movie sequel, and invests it with tidy plotting, emotional resonance, and grounds for playful wit.

Consider the prologue: Maureen, the female half of a black couple attending the premier of *Stab* (the movie within a movie retelling of the events in *Scream*) derides the Anglocentric bent of most horror movies and coaches the silly blond screen prey from the audience. Meanwhile, a real killer murders her boyfriend in the bathroom, and sporting his bloody coat and the promotional *Stab* ghost mask worn by most of the audience, replaces him by her side. When she too is stabbed, she staggers to the front of the theater illuminated by the light of the movie, her face a mask of despair and protest against the unfairness of the attack.

The murders are brutal, but not just brutal. Because they are set up so simply, and because the victims don't behave idiotically, the deaths have a nagging plausibility that killer-chasing-the-bimbo-through-the-dark-house scenarios lack. Maureen correctly ridicules inept Girl Number One from *Stab*. She *should* have hung up on the threatening caller and dialed 911, or *69'ed him. And what *was* that shower scene about if not gratuitous nudity? But getting stabbed by the guy sitting next to you in a dark, noisy theater? That's harsh. That could *happen*, man. And what would you do when you noticed

your boyfriend's coat was covered in blood? She screamed, but the whole audience was screaming. She moved away, but not quickly enough. Likewise, there was nothing terribly wrong with her boyfriend Phil putting his ear against the stall wall in the mens' room, aside from it being vaguely icky. He heard a girl on the other side and was curious. Who wouldn't be? It's not like he had a reason to expect a knife in the ear.

The lack of blatantly moronic behavior is refreshing in any movie, and nearly unheard of in horror flicks. Even in the original *Scream*, where the running joke was that the kids so conversant (boy, were they conversant) in the "rules" of horror movies routinely broke them, the characters were so obnoxious and so stupid that it was hard to take a rooting interest in their fates. On the other hand, when chief target Sydney Prescott busts a crank caller by reading his name off of a caller ID box and quotes the federal law he has just violated, you think she has the makings of a heroine. And though there is too much of the standard "you wait here alone and defenseless while I chase the monster" shtick, the twists of the plot fall within the realm of possibility if not likelihood. You could say the same of most Hitchcock movies, if you dared.

What carries the film over its dubious moments is the compassion written into Kevin Williamson's screenplay. Whereas in the original *Scream* he replicated the annoyances and contrivances of the slasher movies he meant to ridicule, in *Scream 2* he not only avoided the pitfalls of sequels, but retooled their weaknesses into strengths.

For instance, characters are usually developed in the original and the sequel just gives them stuff to do. This isn't a problem in *Scream 2* because characters weren't developed in the original. In a formula movie about formula movies, types (girl with troubled past, her boyfriend, shrill blond with big boobs, etc.) sufficed. The types return in *Scream 2*, but with a shared history and a grace noted script which specifies them. Gale Weathers, for example, is not just a careerist bitch reporter, but a careerist bitch reporter who saved the lives of the returning cast and has subsequently written a book about the experience. So while the other characters still shrink from her exploitative bent, their reaction is complicated by the debt they owe her. When she strikes up a romance with goofy Deputy Dewy, it comes as a beguiling surprise. At the end she escapes becoming a caricature of her own ambition by running away from her cameraman and to Dewy's side, she seems to have been not just spared, but saved. (cont. on page 4)





Cookin' with Cobra

I was sitting in Café Nikos and Nick himself was trying to entice me to enroll in one of his cooking classes. "Now Nick," I said. "If I learned how to cook I'd spend all my time in the kitchen or at Bashas' buying ingredients and you'd never see me!"

"You know how to make coffee and that doesn't stop you from coming in." That was Pat. Where did he come from?

Nick went on to explain that cooking is an art, a philosophy, not just some chore. He tried to enlist Pat's help in convincing me. "I don't know," he said. "I've never seen her cook anything. Which isn't entirely fair as I use the microwave up to once a week, in the creation of my favorite breakfast beverage, for instance.

If your office is like my office, then God help you! HAHHAHA! Just kidding! Mostly. Anyway, we are treated to ice cream on Wednesdays, and every now and then, just to shake things up, the ice cream is served with fancy toppings which have their moment of glory then are shunted off to the fridge where they remain alone and forgotten like that sad, sad cowgirl from *Toy Story 2* (one of my illustrious duties is to clean out the fridge when The Smell returns—and I'm *this close* to notifying the next of kin of that Streets of New York pizza box—so I know all about the little sorrows and abandoned hopes of leftover food). Or to get to the point, we've got a mess of fudge in the fridge here at IKON, and on some special days, I put a big hunk of it in my coffee and milk, then microwave it and stir. The investment of time and resources is enough to keep this recipe in the "treat" category, but if you are craving a cup of coffee that eats like a meal, this is it.

Now, in two pages, Magi will rap with a butcher about marinade. A "marinade" is a liquid in which meat is soaked. I'm not sure what happens to the meat or the marinade afterwards, and frankly Magi wasn't forthcoming. But he did mention that Sioux-Z Wow could be blended with peanut butter for to make Thai sauce. That's all I know, but if you e-mail me, maybe I could put your people in touch with his people.

(cont. on page 6)

There is Such a Thing as a Free Lunch By Evelyn Jensen

What?!

No...it *can't be!*

Free lunch is just a myth!

I hear you cry. But free lunches are out there, and you don't have to do anything unsavory to get them, either. You don't have to be nice to anyone. You don't have to schmooze your boss. And you don't have to drop a business card into one of those big jars that cheap restaurants keep by their hostess stations in a blatant attempt to lure the naïve into their establishments. All you have to do is something which for most of us comes naturally. You have to *complain*.

I would wager a great deal of money that you, like I, have had some sort of horrendous experience in or with a restaurant. They lost the reservation you made for Aunt Enid and her thirteen cronies. Your "medium" steak crawled off its plate. The server wouldn't stop flirting with your date. The server didn't even *try* to flirt with you, and so forth. So very many things can go awry when food and people are involved.

Now, you can get huffy, vent your frustrations then and there, and swear never to return—and if the place is truly abysmal, by all means, do so. Or, *or*, you can seize upon whatever debacle destroyed your dining experience and use it as a means to an end. As you fume, ask yourself, "Could this be my ticket to the fabled free lunch?" If handled properly, it well could be.

So, how does one convert aggravation into lunch? Well, you'll be happy to know that while sources of irritation vary as widely as the quality of restaurants do, the conversion process remains essentially the same.

Whatever the offence you endure, stay in control! If you don't seem reasonable, your complaint will likely not seem reasonable either. Obtain the name of the owner and/or manager. If you dined in a franchise, get the name and title of the corporate bigwig who handles customer service. Note the names of the people involved. Then go home, let your ire fester a bit, then commence your complaint letter.

Complaint letters are *wonderful*. You get to weigh each word for impact without the threat (or reality) of someone yelling back at you. Remain calm, the very soul of reason. (cont. on page 6)



manipulated into believing it is so by the real killer.

As in Greek drama, horror plots are preoccupied with issues of heredity. While the *Scream* trilogy has a postmodern surface (self-conscious imitation of slasher movies, self-conscious imitation of sequels, and self-conscious assertion of directorial independence, respectively), their underlying structure is traditional (sins of the mother visited upon her children, mother's revenge, sins of the mother visited upon her children again, respectively). In *Scream 2*, each concept is embodied by a killer and an arena. The prologue is the realm of the young, movie obsessed punk, the finale on the *Cassandra* set is that of the avenging Mrs. Loomis (the surname borrowed by *Halloween* from *Psycho*, then by *Scream* from *Halloween* is about as notable a lineage as you will find in horror movies). On the set, Mrs. Loomis shoots her accomplice down—a case of the venerable outgunning the trendy, an emblematic goal for a sequel.

(cont. from page 2) Even the murders which exist to kill time before the returning characters are directly imperiled are composed with care. In the prologue, the couple squabbles about who will pay for the popcorn and the relative merits of movies in which “some dumb-ass white girls get their ass cut the fuck up” and those which feature that icon of ethnicity Sandra Bullock. Then in showing a willingness to compromise they betray a sweetness in their relationship that makes their ensuing slaughter not just scary, but sad. Similarly, the obligatory screaming blond dead meat sorority house inhabitant is delineated as a good natured, responsible, “sober sister,” and Sydney’s pledge roommate has touchingly humble aspirations. Williamson’s decision to target sympathetic bit players rather than stuck-up campus queens who say, “Hello—I mean that,” is in itself a departure. True to movie- rules spokesperson Randy prediction about sequels, the body count is higher in *Scream 2*; but unexpectedly, the losses also cut deeper.

Also appropriate to a sequel, *Scream 2* is loaded with doppelgangers. In the context of the story, there are Gale Weathers (pro reporter) and Mrs. Loomis (masquerading as a cub reporter), valiant film geek Randy and evil film geek Mickey, good boyfriend Derek and the palpable memory of really bad boyfriend Billy from *Scream*. Furthermore, the characters recognize their former selves and friends in the movie within a movie, *Stab*. The first girl victim in *Scream 2* gets killed while watching the first girl victim in *Stab* get killed.

Another quality of sequels embraced and enlarged in *Scream 2* is their inherent familiarity. Williamson confronts this problem head on. The killers (there are, fittingly, two) target victims with the same names as those in the original. This inspires a sense of dread and *déjà vu* in the survivors, and also a lot of chit chat on the nature and worth of sequels, from the undeniably great *The Godfather, Part II* to *Return of the Jedi* (“Ewoks—they blow.”)

In the meta-*Scream 2* which depends on the audience’s outside film knowledge, Gale (Courtney Cox) complains that her face was attached to Cox’s *Friends* co-star Jennifer Aniston’s body for internet distribution, Deputy Dewy is played by David Arquette, whose father Lewis plays police chief Hartly, Sydney’s drama coach is played by David Warner who portrayed Jack the Ripper in *Time After Time*, and so forth. Real-life *Scream* fan Paulette Patterson won a MTV sponsored contest and handed Philip and Maureen *Stab* promotional material at the beginning of the movie. Cinematographer Deming was Popcorn Boy, second assistant DK Arredondo made an amazing

As a means of psychically managing the emerging threat, Sydney engages in art therapy dramatics as Cassandra, the tragic Greek figure doomed to foresee the future without the power to change it. The connection between the characters could have been a pretentious throwaway, but instead Williamson and director Wes Craven weave elements and concepts from Greek theater throughout the movie to fortify their film.

Fraternity Brother #2, and director Craven was uncredited as Man at Hospital. These and dozens more touches, which can be found listed on the better *Scream* dedication pages, indicate the filmmakers knew their audience well enough to plant surprises and reward careful viewing, confident that their viewers would pay attention and be charmed. They were right on both counts.



For instance, in the play as in life, the characters are menaced by actors in masks. The carnival-like abandon the liberally distributed ghost masks inspired in the prologue’s movie audience enabled a double murder. Later, Syd glimpsed the mask of the killer who infiltrated her dress rehearsal, and after that, masked and cowled figures snatch her boyfriend. Only when the masks come off are stunned audience members, sympathetic co-stars, vengeful frat brothers(angry that Sydney’s boyfriend gave her his Greek letter pin), the killers and their motives revealed. Though the last are most dramatic, all the mask wearers are dehumanized, and to some extent, suspect. The mask is so iconic that when Sydney sees her boyfriend wearing one, her fear that he is one of the murderers is unconsciously confirmed, and she is easily

I haven’t written enough in tribute to Wes Craven who so splendidly assembled *Scream 2*. As one of the horror genre’s most notable contributors, he has consistently built his movies around original and compelling insights into the human psyche. That’s why his devotees are sorry to lose him to the likes of *Music of the Heart*. But if *Scream* won him his first widespread critical acceptance, and *Scream 3*—with it’s packed gallery of indy movie personalities and horror movie director slain for the benefit of mankind (you have seen *Scream 3*, haven’t you?) marked Craven’s entrée into the mainstream and departure from the genre respectively, *Scream 2* shows how very deft he can be.



Bats in the Grocery

By the Artist Currently Known as Magi

This article until recently was going to be about how unsafe it is to be Prince—even an Artist Formerly Known as Prince—in this modern world; but all has changed with the events of a few days ago.



Names have not been changed to protect the innocent.

My fiancé and I were shopping for dinner at the local AJ's grocery store. In the grand tradition of foreshadowing and plot development, I should say upfront that the clientele, as well as the establishment itself, can be kind of crusty at times. Don't get me wrong—we gladly fight the battle of the crust for the fine product.

Anyhow, we were standing at the butcher's counter, rapping with the butcher about marinade (Sioux-Z Wow, by the way, and I highly recommend it), when out of the corner of my right eye I saw something move from the produce section through the fluorescent air, maybe a foot or two above head level. I decided it must be a bird and didn't give it much thought, as this kind of thing happens every now and again. But as the flittering, flopping creature got nearer, I realized this bird was a bat.

Now bats don't bug either my girl or me, and it was kind of fascinating to see one in this particular habitat. Judging from the shrieks emitted from those in the bats flight path, we were in the minority.

After the bat passed over our heads, it proceeded to our left over the dairy and wine section, did a 180 degree turn, and brought havoc to the entire store in trying to find a way out.

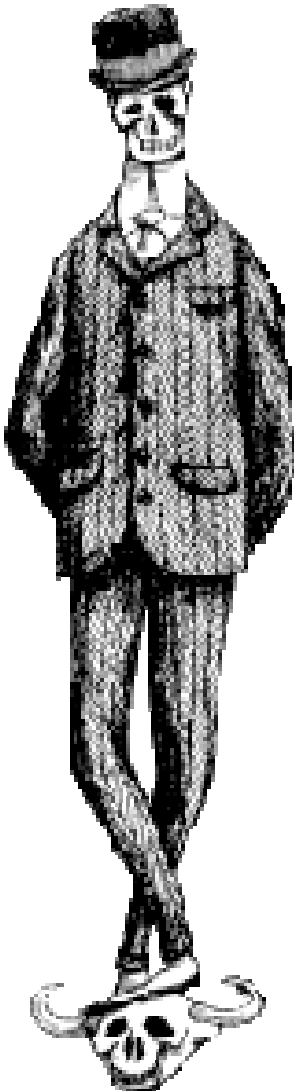
This went on for about a minute, when, as luck would have it, the bat made another pass over our heads and returned to the dairy and wine section. Out of fear or courage, somebody made a very poor attempt at knocking it out of the air by winging a package of linguine at it. This bag of pasta had a low earth orbit that should have embarrassed the hell out of whoever threw it, but I digress.

Next, the bat lodged itself in one of many dry floral wreaths which hang in the cheese area of the dairy section. We didn't want to see the animal get hurt, so I lowered the wreath to the ground and placed one of those hand-held grocery baskets upside down over the bat. By sliding a paper grocery bag underneath the basket, I created a cage in which the bat could be transported outdoors.

I wasn't aware a throng had gathered while I pulled this maneuver. When I stood up to take the bat outside, the store manager and appreciative shoppers showered me with applause—a surreal public moment to say the least. I mean *come on*—this was only a bat.

After the limelight had subsided, the store manager tracked us down and presented us with an AJ's gift certificate. But the most indelible impression I have is of a woman cruising down the wine aisle, hands in a moving coverage of her head, screaming, "IS THERE ANYONE AS FREAKED OUT AS I AM?!"

We'll cover Prince later.



(cont. from page three) Speaking of e-mail, I received the following from my sister Lauren:

Made an adulterous dessert the other day. You may want to try it although it does involve more than two ingredients AND neither of them is water.

Melt 1/2 cup of butter with 1 cup brown sugar. Pour over graham crackers in a single layer on a 11X15 pan. Bake at 350 for 7 min. Cover with 1 bag of Choc. chips. Bake 1 more min and spread to cover. Top with nuts.

Pure evil.

I haven't tested this recipe, either. Even though it does sound more reasonable than one of Scott Rowely's springform pan with paddle attachment extravaganzas, it does contain more ingredients and a lot more steps than I prefer to bother with. But if anyone knows desserts, and evil, for that matter (Mr Enigma even had occasion to tell her she was disgusting—I was so proud), it's my big sis.

So give them a try and let me know how they are. Or better yet, make them and bring them to me. I will happily retitle this column "Cookin' for Cobra" in your honor.

This is the end, bum bum bum, beautiful friend.
This is the end, bum bum bum, my only friend, the end
Of our elaborate plans, the end
Of everything that stands, the end
No safety or surprise, the end
I'll never look into your eyes...again

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Use them.

Or you could contact me using one of the above methods, in which case things needn't get quite so gloomy. Take care till next month.
Love, Cobra

(cont. from page three) If you rave, your letter will likely line the trash bin. By the time the reader gets to the end, however, he or she should feel dreadful about the injustice done to you, and mortified that it should have occurred in his or her establishment.

To facilitate this affect, you may wish to preface your complaint with a little flattery—you'd heard such marvelous things about the restaurant, the food has always been splendid before, you had *such* hopes for a delightful evening—you get the idea. Then begin your tale of woe. Be sincere, and maybe a bit dramatic. Set the scene, name names, cite times, describe dishes, etc. Be clear about who is to blame for what went wrong. To blame a server for over-spiced food, a hostess for stingy portions, a cook for allowing food to sit under a warmer for too long, will only make you look ignorant.

Once each infraction has been limned, explain that your entire evening revolved around a wonderful experience in their restaurant. *Do not* say you will never return, not if your goal is free food. Simply state that you would think twice before entrusting another moment of your precious time in their care. Sometimes I like to allude to the fiercely competitive nature of their profession, and hint that a little "incentive" will give them a competitive edge.

The final few steps are crucial. You *must* painstakingly proofread your screed. Check for usage transgressions, tense problems, mixed metaphors, etc, along with spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors. Subject this letter to as rigorous an inspection as you would your doctoral thesis, because the minutest sign of fallibility could be used as grounds for dismissal of your entire complaint. For this same reason, you must print your letter on the finest stationery you can get your hands on. Do not use company stationery. It's tacky and reads as an intimidation tactic that they will see through immediately. A simple watermarked bond paper or heavy vellum with a matching envelope (with a printed—never scrawled—address) is perfect. If you have personal letterhead, use it.

Mail the letter.

Within a few weeks, you should receive a response, and about ninety percent of the time, this response will include a tempting incentive to remain a loyal customer—at the very least a gift certificate for "dinner for two excluding liquor and gratuity." If it does not, I suggest you boycott the establishment forever and encourage everybody you know to do the same. For this issue is not about truth, or justice, or *pride*—it's about Free Lunch!

About the author: In addition to being my cherished cousin, Evelyn has successfully scribed complaint letters to such noteworthy establishment as Gladstone's, Jerry's Famous Deli, The Spaghetti Factory, The Amazon Café, Chili's, Aunt Annie's Pretzels, and The Home Depot, to name a few.